

5-29-1972

Commencement Address - Rocky Mountain College - China a New Relationship

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/mansfield_speeches

Recommended Citation

Mansfield, Mike 1903-2001, "Commencement Address - Rocky Mountain College - China a New Relationship" (1972). *Mike Mansfield Speeches*. 1039.
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/mansfield_speeches/1039

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Mike Mansfield Papers at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mike Mansfield Speeches by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

CHINA: A NEW RELATIONSHIP

Commencement Address by Senator Mike Mansfield (D., Montana)

Rocky Mountain College, Billings, Montana

Monday, May 29, 1972, 9:30 a.m., M.S.T.

I would like to share with you on this day which is of great importance to you some thoughts of world affairs. One aspect of this subject, in particular, begs for your understanding and attention. That is the relationship between the United States and China. It is uppermost in my mind, at this time, because I have only this month returned from a journey to Peking. The impressions of the visit to that capital and several other Chinese cities are still very vivid. So, too, are my discussions with leaders of the People's Republic.

This is a notable year in U.S.-China relations. The first significant steps in 25 years have been taken towards a general revision of dealings with China. The initiative was long overdue and, hence the backlog of unfinished business is very heavy.

Almost a quarter of a century ago, we cut ourselves off, as a matter of deliberate policy, from all normal relations with the largest nation on earth. We did so by misreading or distorting, in an official sense, the implications of the Chinese revolution which brought a new government to Peking in 1949. Thereafter, we acted on the legal pretense that the People's Republic of China did not exist. Even as we pretended it was not there, we invested heavily in an elaborate system of costly constraints to curtail that government.

The price of this detachment from reality was not trivial. Quite apart from billions spent for counterpoises to China throughout Asia, our present involvement in Viet Nam can be considered, in large measure, to be part of the price of this constraint. So, too, was our earlier involvement in Korea.

These and other military actions were undertaken in the name of a policy called "containment" which was based on a set of assumptions about the nature of events in China, as we guessed or

persuaded ourselves to believe them to be. These assumptions were made in a vacuum because of our isolation from the Chinese mainland. Not surprisingly, many of them turned out to be highly inaccurate.

The tragic cost of the miscalculations can be stated in terms of the lives lost, the bodies maimed and the resources squandered all around the rimlands of Asia, particularly in Korea and Indochina. To be sure, we cannot estimate what the alternative costs might have been had we acted on more accurate assumptions, or had we taken no action at all. Simply on the basis of what did happen, however, history may well record these miscalculations regarding China, as among the most costly of all time.

I might say, parenthetically, that we are at a crucial point, at the present time, in determining whether we will persist in this mistaken course. I refer to events in Viet Nam during the past few weeks. The new U. S. air and sea actions are vestigial responses which arise from the old, not the new China policy which

was signaled by the President's visit to Peking. Whatever the success of these new war measures, they will not alter in any way the overwhelming need of this nation to disengage completely from the Indochina conflict. We need to do so, not to satisfy Hanoi or Peking or Moscow, but in order to serve our own national interests. If we have learned anything to date from this conflict, it is that we have no national stake in that conflict except an end to further casualties and the return of the prisoners of war and the missing in action. The course of action best calculated to serve these national needs remains to negotiate the best political solution without further recourse to arms and to get out of Indochina, lock, stock and barrel.

But, to return to the central theme of my remarks, it is revealing to ask ourselves how we became involved in Viet Nam in the first place. How did we permit ourselves to make such faulty commitments with such disastrous consequences? We get

some clues, I think, when we review the spectrum of our relationship with China over the last two centuries.

More than with other nations, our relationship with China has been subject to the ebb and flow of popular myth. We have tended to oscillate from one oversimplified view of China to another. For almost two centuries, China has been viewed, alternately, as benign or virulent, friendly or hostile, wise or foolish.

Like the "yin" and "yang" of Chinese cosmology which holds that life is the product of a dualism of opposites, our image of China has gone from one extreme to the other. On the one hand, there has been the image of the China of wisdom, intelligence, industry, piety, stoicism and strength. That is the benign China of Marco Polo and Pearl S. Buck; it is the China of the Charlie Chan movies and of the stories of heroic resistance to Japan in the 1930's.

On the other hand, there has been the image of the China of cruelty, barbarism, violence, and faceless hordes. This is the China of drum-head trials, opium dens, bandits, summary executions, Fu Manchu, and the Boxer Rebellion.

In the late 18th century, we looked up to China as an ancient civilization--superior in many aspects of technology, culture, and social order and surrounded by an air of splendid and imperial mystery. In that period, the China trade was sought eagerly by the Clipper ships and Chinese produce was highly valued notably along the Eastern Seaboard and in Europe.

Respect turned to contempt, however, with China's quick defeat in the Opium War of 1840. There followed acts of humiliation of China such as our participation in extra-territorial treaty rights and the Chinese Exclusion Act of the last half of the 19th century.

In the early 20th century, attitudes shifted again to benevolence. American missionaries of many faiths made China a favored field for proselytizing and education. In this period, the Chinese became, for this nation, a guided, guarded, and adored people.

Chinese resistance to the Japanese invasion in 1937 produced another shift from benevolence to admiration. At the end of the Second World War, admiration was displaced by disappointment and frustration, as the wartime truce between Nationalist and Communist forces collapsed in internal strife. This nation became profoundly disenchanted with China, a disenchantment which was replaced abruptly in 1949 by hostility. U. S. Secretaries of State turned their backs on Chinese leaders and spoke of the menace of "Chinese hordes" as predecessors had spoken with similar revulsion of the "yellow peril."

The hostility was largely a reaction, of course, to the coming to power of a Communist regime on the Chinese mainland. We were not only dismayed by this development, we saw it almost as a national affront. Peking was viewed as a treacherous extension of the Soviet steamroller which had reduced Eastern and Central Europe to subservience at the end of World War II. China became in our eyes the Eastern puppet of world communism, to be manipulated by strings pulled in Moscow.

After Chinese forces intervened in the war in Korea where, incidentally, Mao Tse-tung lost his eldest son, U. S. policy was cast anew on the premise that the government on the Chinese mainland was an aggressor. It was seen as ready to use force to impose international Communism anywhere in Asia. Conversely, it was assumed that if the endorsement of the free nations were withheld, this regime which was said to be "alien" to the Chinese people would wither and collapse.

On this premise, it was rationalized that recognition must not be extended to Peking. Instead, the official American view was that the Chinese National Government, which had retreated to the island of Taiwan, continued to speak for all of China. We cut off trade with the Chinese mainland and did whatever could be done to encourage other countries to follow suit. In a similar fashion, a diplomatic campaign was conducted year after year against the seating of the Chinese People's Republic in the United Nations.

We drew an arc of military alliances on the seaward side of China and undergirded them with the deployment of massive U. S. military power in bases throughout the Western Pacific. Tens of billions of dollars were expended in this process. Much of this immense outpouring of effort and money seems incredible now in the light of the President's recent visits to Peking and to Moscow. Yet, it has continued for 20 years and, of course, is still going on, notably, in Indochina.

As has been suggested, this last quarter century of China policy has been characterized by delusion and miscalculation. We assumed, for example, that the Chinese Communists would be unable to govern. We assumed that the Peking government would be an extension of Soviet Communism and a willing accomplice to Soviet purpose and design. And we assumed that the Chinese government would be bent on territorial aggrandizement.

All of these assumptions have proved to be erroneous. In the first place, of the numerous divisions which have arisen within the Communist world, the differences between Moscow and Peking have been the most significant. They so remain today although the rasping edges of the conflict appear somewhat tempered by the periodic flare-ups of the war in Viet Nam.

At the same time, the government of the People's Republic has not only survived, it has provided the Chinese people with effective leadership. Chinese society has achieved a considerable

degree of economic, scientific and social progress. A modern technology has been developed which is sophisticated enough to turn out products ranging from needles and hand-tools to thermo-nuclear devices, earth satellites and the rockets to place them in orbit. A powerful national momentum has been generated which is proving sufficient to supply an enormous population with the wherewithal of decent survival and an improving livelihood.

Notwithstanding assumptions to the contrary, the Chinese government has not shown any great eagerness to use its own armed forces to spread its control abroad. Where Chinese armies have been employed they have been used to assert traditional territorial claims, or in expression of concern for the safety of China's borders. China has not become enmeshed in foreign military adventures. In Viet Nam, for example, the Chinese military involvement has been peripheral. There is Chinese equipment in South Viet Nam but there are no Chinese battalions. In North Viet Nam

reports have indicated the presence, from time to time, not of Chinese combat units, but of labor troops engaged in repairing bomb damage to roads, railroads, bridges and the like.

Chinese actions in Tibet, and along the Himalayan frontier with India, are often cited as examples of militant Communist aggression. Nevertheless, for centuries, Tibet has been universally regarded as falling within China's over-all boundaries. If the Peking government claims that Tibet belongs to China, so, too, does the Chinese National Government on Taiwan. India also acknowledges such to be the case and American policy has never officially recognized Tibet as other than Chinese territory.

Even in Korea, the direct Chinese military involvement did not begin until United Nations forces approached China's borders. In any event, the last Chinese battalions left North Korea years ago.

Looking ahead, it would seem to me that Chinese energies and resources are going to be so preempted by internal needs over the next two decades that there is little likelihood that China could post a serious military danger to the United States even if that were the inclination.

The evidence, in short, is ample to dispel some of the most alarming assumptions on which our past policies have been based. Of course, there is an immense potential danger in China. There is also an immense potential danger in every other powerful nation in a world which has not yet learned how to maintain civilized survival in a nuclear age except on the razor's edge. Insofar as China is concerned, the fundamental question for us is not so much whether it is a danger, but whether our policies will act to alleviate or to exacerbate the danger.

In my judgment, these policies can alleviate the danger only to the extent that they are based on premises that correspond more nearly to realities than has been the case in the past. It will serve no useful purpose to flail at windmills. Now that we have, in 1972, at last penetrated the shroud of obscurity surrounding China, there is reason to hope that our judgments and actions regarding China and Asia, henceforth, will be better informed.

In this new phase of our relations with China, we must beware, of course, that the old pendulum of myth does not now swing to the other extreme, thereby creating a new image of China which is as unreal as the old. We must guard against becoming too enamoured of the splendors of a newly revived amity. Banquets and toasts and shark's fin soup do not of themselves assure a new order of world affairs.

To keep the pendulum in equilibrium in our current approach to China, it would be well to heed a rule laid down by

Lord Palmerston, the prime Minister of Great Britain in the 1860's, who declared:

"We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. . ."

Our experiences in postwar World War II relations with Germany and Japan underscore this observation.

We have not always been very astute about defining where our real interests lie. We have often tended to confuse them with fleeting and transitory images of friendliness or animosity. This is all too true in the case of China where, for 25 years, we have been obsessed with the assumed threat of a perpetual enemy. In fact, we might well have avoided the untold misery and loss of life and resources of the peripheral war in Indochina, had we forgone the poses of power and, instead, taken a harder view of our national interests.

While we cannot identify national interests with exactitude, we do have it within our means to determine much more clearly where it is that they do not lie. The President has shown the way in this connection. Even before his visit to Peking, he had laid the groundwork for reestablishing more normal contact with the People's Republic of China by the removal of discriminatory restriction on travel of Americans to the Chinese mainland and by ending the embargo on trade with China. The embargo had been imposed during the Korean War and was of a design so tight as to exclude even chop-sticks. The fact is, however, that for two decades, it had had no economic impact on China and had served only to injure our own traders. By ending the boycott on the eve of his visit to China, the President removed what was, at most, an irritant to ^{China} / but which would have hampered his efforts to bring about the beginnings of a reconciliation.

As it was, President Nixon was able to lay the groundwork for the growth of contact between the two nations. The chances

are good that the months and years ahead will see a gradual increase in exchanges between China and the United States in medicine and health, science, journalism, athletics, the arts and other pursuits.

An increase in trade is also to be anticipated. The Chinese are in an excellent position to move forward in this connection. It has been their practice to keep imports and exports, worldwide, in rough balance. They have neither external nor internal debt. They have ample exchange reserves. Their international reputation for integrity and reliability in commercial transactions is already very good. A great range of Chinese products is available for sale in the world markets and the Chinese also have a substantial shopping list for imports which will help to speed their own development and strengthen their economic self-reliance.

Exchanges can take place, in my judgment, even though the issue of Taiwan remains, finally, to be resolved. President Nixon has acknowledged as valid, Peking's claim that the island

is part of China. That claim, incidentally, is sustained by the Chinese government on Taiwan. With the assurance that the United States will not pursue a two-China policy, Peking is prepared to go ahead in reestablishing contact with this nation while exploring in its own fashion the road to reunification of the island with the mainland.

Beyond exchanges between China and the United States, there loom larger questions of peace and security in the Western Pacific. Even as we meet here today, we await the consequences of the latest escalation of the U. S. involvement in Viet Nam as well as the full import of the President's discussions in Moscow. One can only hope that we have seen the last resort to retaliation in Indochina, the final burst of this wasting conflict and that progress can now be expected toward a genuine political settlement.

In all candor, the record of this tragic war provides little grounds for optimism in this respect. The invasion of Cambodia did not produce peace. Nor did the invasion of Laos. Nor did the earlier bombing enterprises over North Viet Nam.

Peace was the promise attached, in turn, to each of these escalations of the U. S. involvement. Each, in turn, led not to the promised peace but to ~~the~~ more killed and maimed, more prisoners of war, more missing in action, more and more billions in expenditures to produce more and more devastation throughout Indochina.

The end of this war has yet to come and it is not clear yet when it will come. We would do well, nevertheless, to begin to examine the possibilities of a new security system, based on the realities of the 70's. Those realities urge us to seek, in my judgment, an equilibrium of this nation's interests with those of China, Japan, the Soviet Union and the smaller nations of the Western Pacific. All have a stake in the peace of the region.

The restoration of contact with China furthers the possibility that at some time tripartite discussions might be held between China, Japan, and the United States, if not quadripartite talks, which would also include the Soviet Union. A

development of this kind could do much to allay unfounded mutual fears and to begin to come to grips with the question of adjustment of valid national interests. It could provide insights into such vital questions as the intentions of the various powers in the Western Pacific and how they relate to one another, the economic needs of the Asian nations, and the prospects for curbing nuclear conflict. Most important, such discussions might provide a vehicle for general stabilization of the Indochina peninsula and Southeast Asia in the post-war era.

Adjustments of this kind require fresh perspectives.

We need to see the situation as it is today, not as it appeared 20 years ago in the cataclysmic upheaval of the Chinese revolution.

We need to see the situation not through the fog of an old and stagnant hostility but in the light of the enduring interests of the United States in the Western Pacific which are no less than a peace of equality and mutuality which will permit a flowering of relations with all Asian nations. Nor, may I add, are they any more.

I see great relevance in young men and women thinking deeply of the issues which divide China and the United States to determine how they can be recast in new and uncluttered molds. Unlike my generation, you have already learned much about Asia. You have a greater awareness of its importance to this nation and to the world. Furthermore, you have not had the experience of national trauma in moving abruptly from an era marked by an almost fawning benevolence toward China to one of thorough disenchantment. You were spared the fierce hostilities which rent this nation internally, as a sense of warmth, sympathy, and security regarding China gave way to feelings of revulsion, hatred and insecurity.

You young Americans and your counterparts in China will live your adult years in an era in which much of the world's history will be written in the Pacific. What you do, how you relate to one another--Chinese and Americans--will have much to do with whether or not that history is written in terms of peace and civilized human survival.

I have seen China off and on since I served there in the Marines in the 1920's. I have seen you, your parents and your grandparents much closer up and for a much longer period of time.

I am confident about a future that belongs to your generation, both in China and in this country of ours. This Republic is worthy of your best efforts not only in terms of developing Chinese and U. S. relations, but with regard to the entire world. You can do no more than try to achieve mutual understanding and a peace with all peoples. You can and should do no less.